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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 05/21/08

INDEX:

AMERICAN EMBASSY, TOKYO

PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

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DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS

May 21, 2008

INDEX:

(1) Poll on Fukuda cabinet, political parties, road-specific tax revenues (Asahi)

(2) Pressure for more fiscal expenditures casting pall over reform, as discussion of basic economic policy guidelines kicks off (Asahi)

(3) With plan to double aid to Africa, Fukuda aims to halt ODA slide, alarmed at Japan's waning international status (Tokyo Shimbun)

(4) Dark cloud being cast over Machimura faction's good fortune; Feud between Machimura and Nakagawa intensifying (Sankei)

(5) Japan waives jurisdiction over most GI cases: U.S. archives (Tokyo Shimbun)

(6) Look to Africa (Part 2): Trading firm executive-turned ambassador to Botswana (Mainichi)

(7) Stop cluster bombs (Series 1) - Voices of world and Japan (Part 2): Interview with Ambassador MacKay, permanent representative of

New Zealand to the UN Office in Geneva; Need to serve as deterrent against "bad weapons"; Prevention of unacceptable harm to civilians is our starting point (Mainichi)

(8) Stop cluster bombs (Series 1) - Voices of world and Japan (Part 3): Conflicting viewpoints between two groups of countries as to a total ban and a partial ban (Mainichi)

(9) Editorial: Simple possession of child pornography should be banned (Yomiuri)

(10) Editorial: Japan-U.S-ROK talks must result in progress on nuclear and abduction issues (Yomiuri)

(11) Editorial: Time to make decision to totally ban cluster bombs (Tokyo Shimbun)

ARTICLES:

(1) Poll on Fukuda cabinet, political parties, road-specific tax revenues

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
May 20, 2008

Questions & Answers

(Figures shown in percentage, rounded off. Bracketed figures denote proportions to all respondents. Figures in parentheses denote the results of the last survey conducted Apr. 30-May 1 unless otherwise specified.)

TOKYO 00001398 002 OF 015

Q: Do you support the Fukuda cabinet?

Yes 19 (20)
No 65 (59)

Q: Why? (One reason only. Left column for those marking "yes" on previous question, and right for those saying "no.")

The prime minister is Mr. Fukuda 22(4) 4(3)
It's an LDP-led cabinet 32(6) 21(14)
From the aspect of policies 20(4) 66(43)
No particular reason 23(4) 7(5)

Q: Which political party do you support now?

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 22 (24)
Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 26 (28)
New Komeito (NK) 3 (4)
Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 2 (2)
Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1 (0)
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 0 (0)
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0 (0)
Other political parties 0 (0)
None 38 (34)
No answer (N/A) + don't know (D/K) 8 (8)

Q: Do you think the House of Representatives should be dissolved as early as possible for a general election?

Yes 49
No 41

Q: If you were to vote now in a general election, which political party would you like to vote for in your proportional representation bloc?

LDP 23 (22)
DPJ 39 (39)
NK 3 (4)
JCP 3 (2)
SDP 1 (1)
PNP 0 (0)
NPN 0 (0)

Other political parties 1 (1)
N/A+D/K 30 (31)

Q: Following the reinstatement of a gasoline surcharge in late April, the ruling coalition took a second vote in the House of Representatives on a bill to use gasoline tax revenues for road construction and other road-related infrastructure projects and passed the bill. Do you think it was appropriate to take a second vote on this legislation?

Yes 27
No 63

Q: Prior to the taking of a second vote this time for road construction and other road-related infrastructure projects, the government made a cabinet decision to incorporate gasoline and other road-specific tax revenues into the state's general account budget from next fiscal year. Do you appreciate this?

TOKYO 00001398 003 OF 015

Yes 41
No 46

Q: Prime Minister Fukuda says he will make a review from public horizons of how to use road-specific tax revenues upon incorporating the road tax revenues into the state's general account budget. Do you think Prime Minister Fukuda will be able to substantially change the use of road tax revenues?

Yes 9
No 82

Q: Do you appreciate the DPJ's response to the issue of gasoline and other road-specific tax revenues?

Yes 31
No 50

Q: In April, the government introduced a new health insurance system for those aged 75 and over. Do you appreciate this? (Figures in parentheses denote the results of a survey conducted Apr. 19-20.)

Yes 15 (18)
No 74 (71)

Q: Under this new system, almost all of those aged 75 and over—including dependents who currently do not have to pay insurance premiums—will have to pay premiums in October and afterward. Do you agree to collecting insurance premiums from almost all of those aged 75 and over?

Yes 17
No 75

Q: The government and the ruling coalition will maintain the new health insurance system for the elderly after reviewing it for such measures as lowering the premium for those with low income. Meanwhile, the DPJ and other opposition parties are calling for abolishing the system itself. Which side do you appreciate?

Government, ruling coalition 30
Opposition parties 53

Q: Prime Minister Fukuda met with Chinese President Hu Jintao on the occasion of his recent visit to Japan. Do you appreciate the Japan-China summit this time?

Yes 35
No 47

Q: What's your impression of Prime Minister Fukuda after the Japan-China summit this time? Is it better, worse, or unchanged?

Better 6
Worse 10

Q: All eyes are on foreign leaders about whether they will attend the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony over the Tibet issue. Do you think it would be better for Prime Minister Fukuda to attend the opening ceremony?

TOKYO 00001398 004 OF 015

Yes 56
No 24

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted May 17-18 over the telephone on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis. Respondents were chosen from among the nation's voting population on a three-stage random-sampling basis. Valid answers were obtained from 2,217 persons (60 PERCENT).

(2) Pressure for more fiscal expenditures casting pall over reform, as discussion of basic economic policy guidelines kicks off

ASAHI (Page 6) (Full)
May 21, 2008

The government's Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (CEFP) yesterday started reviewing the state's expenditures and revenues in the run-up to mapping out in late June a set of basic policy guidelines on economic and fiscal management and structural reforms for the fiscal 2008 national budget. However, the ruling parties are increasingly calling for boosting expenditures in such areas as social security. A plan to reform revenues and expenditures as a set, which has been in place since the Koizumi administration, has now reached a critical juncture.

Prime Minister Fukuda during the CEFP meeting yesterday called for firmly maintaining the government goal of moving the primary balance of the central and local governments into the black by fiscal 2011, noting: "It is harsh to cut expenditures. However, we should not stop our reform effort now for the sake of future generations, as well. The government will cut wasteful spending without protected sanctuaries."

Moving the primary balance into the black means achieving the government's fiscal soundness where expenditures, excluding debt payments, are balanced by tax revenues, that is to say, progress on the recapitalization of the nation's financial base to some degree.

The government has been propelling spending cuts, incorporating in the basic guidelines for fiscal 2006 this goal for achieving the primary balance and goals for attaining a budget cut in each sector. However, since the ruling parties suffered a crushing defeat in the Upper House election last summer, calls for a spending increase have been gaining ground, the lawmakers citing that they cannot fight in the next general election if the situation remains as is.

Pressure for more spending is particularly strong in three areas: social security, including medical services, education, and official development assistance (ODA). Related agencies and policy specialists in those areas are actively trying to secure increased budgets, as can be seen in that Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Yoichi Masuzoe pointed out the need to take a second look at the goal of constraining social security expenditures.

Prime Minister Fukuda has come up with a policy of shifting special-purpose road construction revenues for more general usage so that squeezed funds can be used for medical services, measures to protect the environment, and education. This has fueled a budget-grabbing battle. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MLIT) and road policy experts in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) are trying to fend off such moves in an effort to hold

TOKYO 00001398 005 OF 015

on to the road budget.

One private-sector member during the CEFP meeting yesterday drove the point home, "Some media reports say that the government policy of allocating road revenues for general usage might slow spending reform, but we must not allow the reform drive to slow down." However, there is the possibility of the present goal of cutting expenditures being revised, if the distribution of budgetary funds is changed significantly as a result of the reallocation of road revenues for general usage. Some Finance Ministry officials take the view that principles would be chipped away, if budget allocation is increased in certain areas. There is a widespread sense of caution that should that occur, expenditures would continue to rise.

Consideration given to ruling parties in tax code discussion

The time-limit for hiking the consumption tax is drawing near, because the government plans to raise the ratio of the basic pension (national pension) funded from tax revenues from the current one-third to 50 PERCENT. This would cost funding resources worth approximately 2.3 trillion yen or a rise in the consumption tax by 1 PERCENT. The LDP Tax System Research Commission and the government's Tax Research Commission will speed up debate on a consumption tax hike.

Private-sector members of the CEFP, including Fujio Miarai, chairman of the Japan Business Federation (Nippon Keidanren), at the CEFP meeting yesterday proposed a taxpayer identification number system intended to prevent tax evasion, by grasping the income of tax payers, and a tax deduction system attached with a benefit package aimed at reducing low-income earners' tax burden. One aim of those proposals is to pave the way for raising the consumption tax rate, by giving consideration to income disparities and a sense of fairness.

Finance Minister Nukaga at the meeting called for a drastic tax code revision before year's end. Yutaka Kozai, chairman of the government's Tax Research Commission noted, "The Tax Research Commission will pursue discussion more scrupulously than before." Private-sector members echoed, "It is necessary to drastically reform the tax code, including the consumption tax."

However, the CEFP has no plan to hold the next meeting on the tax code in preparation for drafting of basic guidelines for fiscal 2008 due to the political consideration that it should not move ahead before discussion by the ruling moves into high gear. Basic guidelines for fiscal 2008 will adopt words similar to those included in the fiscal 2007 version of basic guidelines, which stipulated that efforts will be made in order to realize a drastic reform of the tax code, including the consumption tax.

Many elements in the government are of the view that the rest should be left to the prime minister and the ruling camp to make a political decision. However, whether the prime minister will decide to raise the consumption tax at a time when his cabinet support ratings are low remains unclear. Barriers to raising the consumption tax are high, because the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) also intends to place a moratorium on a consumption tax hike until the next general election.

(3) With plan to double aid to Africa, Fukuda aims to halt ODA slide, alarmed at Japan's waning international status

TOKYO 00001398 006 OF 015

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
May 21, 2008

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda said in a meeting of the Overseas Economic Cooperation Conference yesterday that Japan would double its official development assistance (ODA) disbursements to Africa over the next five years ending in 2012. With an eye on applying the brakes to ODA budget cutbacks, Fukuda is aiming to increase diplomatic activities in order to attain his policy goal of turning Japan into a peace-cooperation state.

The prime minister's decision to double ODA disbursements to Africa reflects his strong alarm at the recent decline of Japan's stance as

an aid donor in the international community.

Over the decade from 1997, Japan's ODA budget in the general account (cash outlays) decreased about 40 PERCENT . In real terms, Japan, which once was the world's biggest aid donor, slipped to fifth place (based on provisional figures) among the 22 member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) last year.

Fukuda therefore decided to significantly increase spending on ODA projects ahead of the 4th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) to start on May 28, saying: "We must not disappoint the leaders of more than 40 participating countries."

In 2005, then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi announced a plan to double ODA outlays to Africa over the next three years. Hidden in the plan, though, was the "trick" of achieving the goal by accumulating forgiven debts, since the government was facing severe fiscal straits.

The new plan is designed not to write off debts but to increase new ODA allocations from about 100 billion yen to 200 billion yen. Money for non-reimbursable (grant) aid is disbursed from the general account budget. Given this, a Foreign Ministry source deemed the doubling plan as one step toward expanding ODA funds.

In a meeting of the House of Councillors' Special Committee on May 16, in which the ODA doubling plan was adopted, Prime Minister Fukuda said in reference to a plan to shift highway-related tax revenues to the general budget: "I expect the increased portion in the general account will be incorporated in the ODA budget." He thus expressed his desire to see an increase in ODA funds.

But the policy guidelines for 2006 specified an annual 2-4 PERCENT cut in ODA disbursements over the five years starting in FY2007. Many take the view that the guidelines must be reviewed before the ODA budget is boosted. The government intends to determine policy guidelines for this year at a cabinet meeting in late June. In negotiations on the guidelines, the focus of discussion is expected to be on how to coordinate this ODA-reduction policy and the new doubling plan.

Now that the government is being pressed to finance expenditures in the social security area, such as a review of the health insurance system for people aged 75 or older, it will not be easy for it to raise funds.

(4) Dark cloud being cast over Machimura faction's good fortune;

TOKYO 00001398 007 OF 015

Feud between Machimura and Nakagawa intensifying

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
May 20, 2008

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party's Machimura faction (formally, the Seiwa Policy Study Group, with a membership of 86), which has produced four LDP presidents including Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, last evening held a fund-raising party at the Tokyo Ground Prince Hotel in Akasaka. The largest reception hall in Tokyo was filled with approximately 5,000 people, a demonstration of the faction's strength. But what was lacking there was any emotional uplift. This is because the momentum of the Fukuda administration has rapidly declined. Moreover, a factional feud between Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura and former LDP Secretary General Hidemao Nakagawa has grown stronger. Dark clouds seem to be casting a shadow over the good fortune of the LDP's largest faction.

The party was extremely well attended, and three especially set-up rooms on a different floor were also full to capacity.

LDP Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki was surprised, saying, "A faction that has produced four prime ministers in succession was able to gather so many!" Election Strategy Council Chairman Makoto Koga complimented the faction: "The Seiwa Policy Study Group has produced monumental work, unprecedented in the LDP's history." Former

Secretary General Taro Aso, who is waiting for the prime minister's post once Fukuda leaves office, showed his loyalty when he said: "I vow to join your efforts to overcome the biggest crisis since the party was founded." Last September when the Fukuda cabinet was inaugurated, the faction adopted a caretaker system under which it is led by three senior members -- Machimura, Hidemao Nakagawa, and Shuzen Tanigawa, chairman of the party plenary of both chambers of the Diet. However, Nakagawa has the real power. Former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori has become the faction's supreme advisor. As a result, the Machimura faction is controlled actually by Mori and Nakagawa.

Nakagawa said:

"In TV dramas, politicians are described as villains. For the first time, a politician is being depicted as a hero in Fuji TV's drama 'Change.' The starting point of politics is honesty. We, the Seiwa group, should continue to produce heroes and heroines."

He underscored the strength of numbers that the largest faction in the LDP held. He sought to constrain moves by those faction members waiting to succeed Fukuda as prime minister.

The Machimura faction descended from the Seiwakai faction founded by the late Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda. It struggled alone for many years as the anti-mainstream force of the LDP, but after Mori became prime minister in 2000, the tide turned. The faction then produced in succession the Koizumi, Abe and Fukuda administrations. Mori has been a kind of kingmaker for the faction, much like the late Shin Kanemaru, who once served as LDP vice president.

But cracks can now be seen in the Machimura faction's once iron-clad unity.

Because Nakagawa, a dyed-in-the-wool politician, and Machimura, a bureaucrat-turned politician, do not get along, their jockeying for

TOKYO 00001398 008 OF 015

power has intensified. Mori has warned them: "You should not think only about the next presidential race. We should consider how we should back our colleague (Fukuda) from our faction." But the confrontation between Nakagawa and Machimura has continued to escalate.

Another development is a move to possibly field former Defense Minister Yuriko Koike as a candidate in the next party presidential race. Shinzo Abe, who rejoined the faction in March, has deep ties with Aso. A mid-level faction member said: "The Machimura faction could fall apart during the next presidential race."

Ibuki in his toast, praised Prime Minister Fukuda for doing his best under a difficult situation, adding that he wanted the faction members to line up and support him. His comments can be taken as a bit of nastiness toward the Machimura faction.

Mori in his toast said: "I pray for Japan's prosperity and peace in the international community." But what indeed was he thinking deep down inside?

(5) Japan waives jurisdiction over most GI cases: U.S. archives

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Full)
May 18, 2008

In 1953, the Japanese and U.S. governments made a secret deal over incidents involving U.S. military personnel in Japan. At the time, Japan agreed to give up its jurisdiction over their cases with the exception of major crimes. As a result, Japan waived its primary jurisdiction over 97 PERCENT of those incidents that took place during the following period of about five years. This fact became known from declassified U.S. government documents.

In those days, Japan held court trials over criminal cases involving U.S. soldiers. According to one of the declassified U.S. official documents, however, the U.S. government took Japan's criminal punishments as lighter than anticipated. The U.S. government later

asked the Japanese government to make public the arcane deal. However, the then prime minister, Nobusuke Kishi, did not agree to do so for fear of a potential backlash in Japan. Kishi was quoted as saying, "If we spill the beans, it would be disgraceful."

Concerning crimes committed by off-duty U.S. soldiers, Japan is said to have had primary jurisdiction over their cases under the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The Japanese government takes the position that it has not waived its jurisdiction. In Okinawa and other prefectures, however, prosecutors dropped a number of cases. There were also many cases that were not tried in Japan. In fact, Japan used to waive its jurisdiction.

The official documents, created between 1958 and 1966, were discovered at the U.S. National Archives.

These declassified documents include a confidential telegram, which, dated Oct. 2, 1958, was sent from Secretary of State Dulles to the U.S. Embassy in Japan. In this arcane document, Dulles wrote that the United States "should obtain Japan's waiver of its jurisdiction if and when the United States agrees to revise the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty." With this, Dulles suggested the need to make public the secret deal.

TOKYO 00001398 009 OF 015

Two days later, Ambassador MacArthur met with Prime Minister Kishi. In the meeting, MacArthur asked Kishi: "Japan has customarily waived its jurisdiction without revealing the secret record of discussions in 1953, and I'd like to ask you to clarify that Japan will do so in the future," Kishi, however, disagreed.

According to a document created by the U.S. State Department in June 1957, Japan had primary jurisdiction over about 13,000 cases after 1953 and waived its jurisdiction over 97 PERCENT of those cases. Actually, Japan held court trials over only 400 cases or so.

Another document created that month had a description of cases tried at Japanese courts, saying Japan's criminal punishments are lighter than those tried in U.S. courts martial.

The secret deal was taken over even after the security pact was revised. In the 1960s, South Korea and Taiwan called for conditions on the same plane as those for Japan. In its negotiations with South Korea and Taiwan, the United States attempted to refer to the facts about Japan's waiver of jurisdiction. According to the document, however, Japan rejected it.

(6) Look to Africa (Part 2): Trading firm executive-turned ambassador to Botswana

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
May 21, 2008

"I want you to carry out resource diplomacy," Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on May 13 told Ryoichi Matsuyama, who had just been appointed as Japan's first ambassador to Botswana. The Japanese government established its embassy in an African country in January this year. Fukuda was briefed on the resource situation in Botswana for about 20 minutes by Matsuyama, a former managing director of Mitsui Bussan.

The Republic of Botswana has a population of 20 million. Just 36 Japanese reside in that country. Annual trade between Japan and Botswana totals only 4 billion yen. The Japanese government's purpose of sending the former trading house executive there is to secure such rare metals as nickel and chrome.

Rare metals are the new strategic materials, indispensable in the manufacturing of high-tech products such as cellular phones. However, the producing areas are limited to China, Russia and Africa.

China has already inhibited its exports of rare materials. Japan has been forced to seek new suppliers. Britain and France, former colonial powers, have secured interests in Africa. The exports of

Botswana to Britain account for 75 PERCENT .

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Akira Amari, who became the first Japanese cabinet minister to visit Botswana last November, urged Botswana President Festus Mogae to review its relations with former suzerain powers, noting: "Are they partners to whom you sell ores or partners who nurture your industries?" Japan's technology to predict underground reserves based on data collected from satellite images was the key to an agreement between Japan and Botswana on joint research on rare materials. Amari and Mogae also agreed that Japan would provide Botswana with know-how.

TOKYO 00001398 010 OF 015

Japan, which has been experiencing financial difficulties, cannot win competition to increase aid amounts. Japan must break doors of the former colonial powers by its technology and experience of providing aid over the years.

(7) Stop cluster bombs (Series 1) - Voices of world and Japan (Part 2): Interview with Ambassador MacKay, permanent representative of New Zealand to the UN Office in Geneva; Need to serve as deterrent against "bad weapons"; Prevention of unacceptable harm to civilians is our starting point

MAINICHI (Page 8) (Full)
May 20, 2008

The Mainichi Shimbun interviewed Ambassador Don MacKay, who served as chairperson of the Wellington Conference on Cluster Bombs of the Oslo Process, about the points of contention in drafting a draft treaty banning cluster munitions.

Interviewer: Katsumi Sawada

We have still several sticking points, but I believe it is possible for us to reach a final agreement on a draft treaty banning cluster munitions.

We had intensive discussion in informal talks under the Wellington Conference (held this past February as part of the Oslo Process). I refrained from mentioning states by name, but many countries reconsidered their positions in the Wellington Conference (concerning the definition related to a total ban or a partial ban that will allow some exceptions). With the final stage of talks approaching, each state has begun trying to meet halfway.

When we discuss the definition, I think we need to return to the spirit of the Oslo Declaration (issued in February 2007, which decided to start the Oslo Process), namely, "Prohibit weapons that cause unacceptable harm to civilians."

The Oslo Declaration does not mention a total ban. What we are going to create is not a disarmament treaty but a humanitarian treaty. If weapons are developed that will not have a harmful effect on civilians, we are positive about them. It is a good thing that during the year and a half since (the process started), many states have begun looking for ways to make (cluster bombs) more reliable and accurate (with less numbers of unexploded elements).

Another point of contention is whether there would be any trouble when a joint military campaign with non-member states (of the Oslo Process, for instance, the United States and Russia is carried out after a treaty banning cluster munitions is concluded). A considerable number of major states call for modifying the draft treaty. In this regard, we need to well deal with that.

If this treaty is concluded, cluster bombs will be labeled as "bad weapons." Non-member states (such as the U.S. and Russia) would be forced to be prudent about using them, so civilian casualties caused by unexploded munitions would be reduced. The draft treaty also mentions the need to improve assistance to victims. This is also a very important element.

Each state's position as to definition of cluster munitions

Exceptions to ban Major states

Group of states favoring a total ban on cluster bombs No exception
Norway, Ireland, New Zealand

Group A of states favoring a partial ban Allows exception about
latest bombs (equipped with target designation system) Germany,
U.K., France

Canada and Australia

Sweden

Group B of states favoring a partial ban Allows exception about
improved bombs (equipped with self-destruct mechanism) and latest
bombs Japan

Finland

(8) Stop cluster bombs (Series 1) - Voices of world and Japan (Part
3): Conflicting viewpoints between two groups of countries as to a
total ban and a partial ban

MAINICHI (Page 8) (Full)

May 21, 2008

Katsumi Sawada, Dublin

The Oslo Process is aiming to produce a convention banning cluster munitions by the end of this year, but there has been the strong conflict of views between the two groups of countries participating in the process over the question of whether to totally or partially ban cluster bombs. A major point of contention in the Dublin Conference on Cluster Munitions is how to define exceptions and weapons that will not be subject to prohibition. Meanwhile, the United States, which is not a member of the Oslo Process, has given a warning to the Dublin Conference.

A major subject for discussion in the Dublin Conference is what to do about a draft treaty, which Norway and some other countries jointly submitted to the Wellington Conference on Cluster Bombs held this past February. The draft treaty defines cluster munitions as the "weapons that release explosive submunitions" and then it leaves room to put down exceptions to the ban. A major point in issue in the Dublin Conference is to discuss what will be put down for this exception provision and how to define weapons subject to the ban.

Norway and some other countries calling for a total ban call for reducing the number of exceptions to as few as possible. Meanwhile, Japan, Britain, Germany, France and some other countries are opposed, calling instead for a partial ban so that some weapons could be made exceptions. These countries have come up with a proposal to modify the draft treaty. The host country of the Dublin Conference, Ireland, notes: "The points of contention have now been considerably narrowed down."

Group of countries calling for partial ban divided

What has made the situation complex is the fact that the group of countries calling for a partial ban has now divided into two sub-groups.

Proposals aimed at modifying the draft treaty that have been presented by the group of countries calling for a partial ban are broadly divided into two categories. One is Japan's proposal to except improved weapons equipped with a self-destruct device that will function when bombs fail to detonate. Another proposal has been submitted by Germany. This proposal would except the latest weapons

TOKYO 00001398 012 OF 015

equipped with a target designation system, with a similar system also installed in their submunitions.

The U.S. possesses a large number of the improved weapon, and in actual combat, their dud rate exceeds 10 PERCENT. With such bombs, the unexploded components could cause harm to civilians. But in the case of the latest model, the dud rate is low and the number of submunitions is also limited.

Britain, Germany, France, and Canada are insisting that the improved models also should be prohibited, while Japan and Finland are trying to keep the improved models. These two groups are wide apart in their views. International attention is now on how far the group of countries calling for a partial ban can unify views internally.

However, the U.S. has cast a pall over the Dublin Conference. A senior U.S. official suggested to the Japanese media, including the Mainichi Shimbun, there was "a new policy," implying there has been improvement to lower the rate of failure to detonate. The official sought to check the Dublin Conference. Behind this move is Washington's intention to adopt the pose that it is taking improvement measures on its own and use this to slow the momentum to conclude a convention.

The draft treaty prohibits the non-member states (of the Oslo Process) from using cluster bombs against member states. Japan has questioned this provision and has insisted on reconsidering it, noting that trouble could arise in joint operations with countries that are not signatories to the Oslo Process, such as the U.S.

(9) Editorial: Simple possession of child pornography should be banned

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Full)
May 6, 2008

In order to protect children from criminal harm, there should be no hesitation to strengthen the legal system. A ruling parties' project team is working on amending the Child Prostitution and Child Pornography Law. This law was enacted in 1999 as Diet member-sponsored legislation. It bans such activities as providing nude or semi-nude images of children under 18 "that excite or stimulate prurient desires."

The ruling camp's project team has set a policy direction of newly banning and punishing the "simple possession" of child pornography collected by individuals. Although the banning of simple possession of child pornography was debated at the time of the law's enactment, the issue was shelved because of the arguments that "consideration be given to the privacy of the possessor," and "concerns about the abuse of investigative authority."

However, with the rapid expansion of child pornography on the Internet, advanced industrialized countries have begun to toughen restrictions. The only countries in the Group of Eight (G-8) that have not banned simple possession are Japan and Russia.

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Schieffer has expressed to Justice Minister Hatoyama his expectation that simple possession would be banned in Japan. The fact that simple possession is allowed in Japan has become an obstacle to closer international cooperation in investigating child pornography. Once images flow into the Net, it

TOKYO 00001398 013 OF 015

is difficult to retrieve them. The children who are filmed being sexually assaulted will continue to bear deep moral scars all their lives.

In Nara Prefecture, where the tragic incident of a child having been kidnapped and slain by a person with such a mania, the simple possession of pornography of children under 13 years of age was banned three years ago.

An opinion poll carried out last year by the Cabinet Agency found 90 PERCENT of the public approving the restriction of simple possession of child pornography. The opportunity is already ripe.

The ruling camp's project team plans to introduce a system of blocking under which the provider would cut off connections to child-porno sites. Some of the debate has been over whether restrictions should be applied to cartoons, anime, and computer graphics (CG) that depict child pornography scenes. In the United States and France, such material, too, is subject to restrictions. On the other hand, in Britain, CG animations alone are banned, with

anime and comics being outside the scope of the law. There thus are slight differences depending on the country in handling this issue.

There is also the problem of freedom of expression associated with placing restrictions, so careful debate seems necessary. But first of all, banning the simple possession and introducing a blocking system should be the focus of attention and considered when amending the law.

(10) Editorial: Japan-U.S.-ROK talks must result in progress on nuclear and abduction issues

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Full)
May 21, 2008

Director-level talks between Japan, the United States, and South Korea have taken place after a long interval. We would like to see the North Korean nuclear issue, now at a crucial stage, move forward through close cooperation between the three countries.

Through their talks in Washington, the three countries' chief delegates to the six-party talks confirmed the policy course to enhance trilateral cooperation to ensure that North Korea presents a complete and correct declaration of its nuclear programs.

The three countries lacked unity toward the end of the term of the former Roh Moo Hyun administration of South Korea. Trilateral talks were not held regularly. The United States separately briefed Japan and South Korea on its talks with North Korea in early April in Beijing.

With the launch of the Lee Myung Bak administration, which places high priority on the Japan-U.S.-South Korea framework, and a changeover of the South Korean chief negotiator, the stage has finally been set for trilateral talks.

Differences in views on the nuclear issue among the three countries have always been mentioned as a factor since the late 1990s. Although their ultimate goal is to make North Korea abandon its nuclear ambitions, the three countries' approaches and priority policies vary. Such cannot be helped because they are separate

TOKYO 00001398 014 OF 015

countries.

It is important to make efforts to find effective means to force the North into abandoning its nuclear programs, while endeavoring to bridge the gaps. The significance of the trilateral talks lies there.

The amount of extracted plutonium is the biggest point of contention in declaring nuclear programs. The United States' estimate of 50 kilograms clashes with the North's assertion of 30 kilograms.

In early May, North Korea submitted to the United States voluminous records of operations of its nuclear facilities. Can they underpin the North's claim? They must be verified by experts.

There are only eight months left until the Bush administration leaves office. Some in the administration want to swiftly finish the nuclear declaration process to move on to the next level with the aim of accomplishing an historical achievement. But others think that an ambiguous settlement would leave serious problems for the future.

Geopolitically, Japan is more exposed to the North Korean nuclear threat than the United States and South Korea. There is every reason to demand a complete and current declaration from a security viewpoint.

The North has demanded it be taken off the U.S. list of nations sponsoring terrorism in return for its nuclear declaration. Delisting is important diplomatic leverage for Japan, the United States, and South Korea. It must be used in a manner that is most effective.

In the latest bilateral talks, Japan underscored the as long as there is no progress on the abduction issue, the North's request for delisting should be dealt with cautiously. The United States and South Korea reportedly expressed their understanding.

Even if the North promises a reinvestigation into the whereabouts of the abduction victims, that alone would not be enough to be called "progress." It is essential to attain substantial "progress" leading to repatriation of victims and uncovering of the facts.

(11) Editorial: Time to make decision to totally ban cluster bombs

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
May 20, 2008

The "Oslo Process" Dublin conference on cluster bombs that can indiscriminately kill and wound civilians has started. We hope for an agreement to ban cluster bombs altogether. This is the time for the Japanese government to decide to totally abolish its stock of cluster bombs.

The Dublin conference runs through May 30 in Ireland's capital. The focus is on whether to decide to totally or partially ban cluster bombs.

Conferences of signatories to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) have been discussing restrictions on the use of cluster bombs since 2001. The talks have stalled because the United States, China, and Russia that possess large numbers of cluster

TOKYO 00001398 015 OF 015

bombs planned not to be forced into a total ban. A conclusion has yet to be reached.

Dissatisfied, Norway and other countries have been pushing ahead with the Oslo Process since February 2007 with the aim of concluding a treaty in 2008. The Oslo Process does not include the United States, China, and Russia. Many European countries are in favor of a total ban, whereas Britain, Germany, and France are advocating a partial ban.

Cluster bombs are air-dropped munitions that are designed to scatter smaller bomblets over wide areas to cause damage to ground troops and others.

Cluster bombs have been used in conflicts in such countries as Iraq, Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia (Serbia), and Lebanon. The conflicts are over, but there have been many reports of civilians who were killed or injured by unexploded bomblets.

Branislav Kapetanovic, a former Serbian soldier, lost both hands and feet when a bomblet exploded when he was going to destroy it (in 2000). He has been calling for the abolition of brutal weapons, saying: "One cluster bomb can destroy two, three soccer grounds. Over 95 PERCENT of victims would be civilians. (Cluster bombs) are monster weapons."

Let us recall the Convention on the Prohibition of Antipersonnel Mines. It prohibits using, stockpiling, producing and transferring antipersonnel mines. Because of this convention, the United States finds it effectively impossible to use antipersonnel mines. It is also possible to totally prohibit cluster bombs. We would like to see the participating countries put their wisdom together at the Dublin conference.

Japan's basic position is that cluster bombs are necessary for security reasons, aligning itself with Britain, Germany, and France. Japan's consideration for the United States, which does not want to see a treaty banning cluster bombs, is obvious.

The people and government of Japan have long called for the complete abolition of nuclear weapons; they are still making efforts to that end. They should also strive for the complete abolition of cluster bombs.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda should demonstrate a resolute stance to the international community.

SCHIEFFER